

Intangible Cultural Heritage Update

News and notes on Newfoundland and Labrador's Intangible Cultural Heritage Program

April-May 2013
ISSN 1918-7408

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Talking Shop: Metalworking

On Wednesday, May 1st, at 7pm, join the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador (HFNL) at The Rooms Theatre for "Talking Shop: Metalworking."

To highlight The Room's new exhibit *Silver: a Noble Metal*, this Engaging Evening will explore the craft of metalworking. Folklorist Dale Jarvis will host Don Beaubier, Susan Lee Stephen, and Jason Holley, three local artists who work with metal, and who will join us to talk about their experience creating their pieces of art with silver and other metals.

The presentation is organized to coincide with a recent Rooms exhibit, "*Silver: A Noble Metal*." In chemistry, silver is considered a noble metal; it is resistant to corrosion and oxidation and is considered precious due to its rarity in the Earth's crust. From silverware to jewelry, pocket watches and trophies, silver was once mined and worked right here in Newfoundland.

Silver has been a status symbol for centuries, its artisans creating functional works of art but also paying attention to styles and trends. It has also been considered a great reward and is given as an award to important dignitaries, athletes and heroes on the battlefield.

The exhibition examines silver (sterling and plate), its uses and markings and its production within the province.

"Talking Shop: Metalworking" is the most recent collaboration between The Rooms and HFNL's Intangible Cultural Heritage office. Previous evenings have seen interviews with locals about their St. John's memories, an evening with the man behind Santa's red suit, and most recently, the stories of new Canadians from former Soviet countries as part of HFNL's "Newfiki" celebrations.

Photo: Soldering in the studio, courtesy of Susan Lee Studios.

Tanning Fishing Nets

“Hot water, spruce bark, and catechu”

By Doug Wells

According to my father, John Wells, of Harbour Breton, this is the process used in tanning nets in the isolated community of Muddy Hole in Hermitage Bay. He is 86 years old now and has vivid memories of tanning nets during the early 1940s, while assisting his father in the fishing industry and later as a fisherman with his brother, until resettlement in 1965.

Preparations for tanning were done near the shoreline, next to the fishing premises. In Muddy Hole, large rocks near the fishing stages provided a good location for the tanning process. A fire was lit under an iron tan pot full of fresh water. Added to the water were small pieces of black spruce bark and heated until boiling point was reached. Black spruce bark was desired but red and white spruce bark was used at times as well. Thick spruce bark was obtained from large spruce trees in nearby Facheux Bay.

Once boiled, the sappy like solution was put in puncheons or half-puncheon containers ready for the next step. Added to the hot water were brown chunks of catechu. Stirring with a paddle or slice continued for some time until the catechu was completely dissolved. Catechu was purchased locally by the pound. Some fishermen in Muddy Hole added baking soda to the tan mixture as it was supposed to make the tan more absorbent in the cotton twine of the nets.

Once ready, the herring net or salmon net was placed in the tan mixture, completely submerged, and left overnight. After taking the nets out of the tan, they were hung on a rail or net beam connected to the fishing stage and left to completely dry before placing in the ocean again.

The whole tanning process was quite labour intensive but absolutely necessary to extend the life of the nets. Twine deteriorates in the ocean, from storage, and from wear and tear so tanning was a necessary process to slow down the deterioration and extend the life of the twine. When fishermen noticed the nets turning white again, after use, the tanning process would be repeated. Tanning was generally done once a year. As boys, we were always cautioned not to get too much of the tanning

stain on our hands. By the mid-1900s, tanning nets was not necessary as nylon twine replaced cotton twine in fishing nets and later monofilament line was introduced that had practically an unlimited life span.



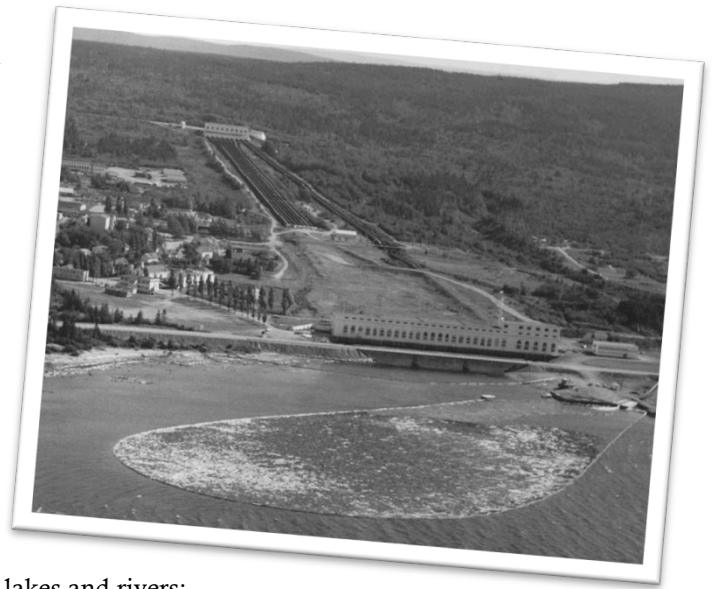
Top photo: John Wells (left) and Jim Wells, brothers and fishing partners, taken in 1963 on the government slipway in front of the last dory built in Muddy Hole. Bottom photo: the community of Muddy Hole in 1912, showing the "up harbour" part of the community. Photos courtesy of Doug Wells.

Deer Lake Heritage Project

By Amanda-Marie Hillyard

The Deer Lake area is one of picturesque natural beauty and rich heritage and culture. The town is nestled on the shores of Deer Lake, which gives the town its name, and was named for the large herds of caribou settlers watched fording the lake. Deer was what the settlers were familiar with, and was what they called these herds so vast that the head of the herd was on one shore while the tail end of the herd was still in the woods on the far side of the lake.

In the woods surrounding Deer Lake are several other towns and settlements, each steeped in history and heritage: Nicholsville, where the first settlers in the region lived; Cormack, where World War II war veterans and their war brides settled; Reidville, which once took a full day to reach by boat up the river from Deer Lake; Howley, a town once only connected by train and spread throughout a series of ponds, lakes and rivers; Spillway, a community that grew up around where the Deer Lake Power House spillway met the lake.



The formal townsite was constructed in 1925, and served as a camp at first for the International Pulp and Paper Company, though the first settlers, loggers, trappers and farmers, came in 1864. The area has a rich history and heritage - the connections to the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Mill, which was originally supposed to be built at Deer Lake; the Deer Lake Power House, and the construction that used equipment originally used to dig the Panama Canal; the Deer Lake Airport, which saw Queen Elizabeth II land there in 1959; the Newfoundland Railways and later the Canadian National Railways; logging, fishing, hunting, and farming in the area, as well as the daily lives of intrepid pioneers and hardy souls determined to build a good life in an area with abundant natural resources and beauty.

Because the town is not centuries old, though it has seen immense change over time, there are still many senior citizens who remember the past in this area. Many were young adults or children in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s and have many stories to tell of times gone by. Elders are our tradition bearers, and holders of knowledge and experience. They have insights and memories of ways of life, traditions, cultures, occupations, customs and beliefs that are vanished from our land, or are fast fading. Our elders are a mostly untapped resource, and the Deer Lake area has a rich heritage that has been barely explored. Our elders deserve a chance to speak, to enrich our community with their stories and wisdom, to give us insights and a window into the past of this area.

The Deer Lake Heritage Project is doing exactly that; interviewing willing seniors and gathering their stories and memories, as well as copying historical or culturally significant photographs and building an inventory of artefacts from the past that they may possess. They have hired Amanda-Marie Hillyard, who has a Masters in Folklore from Memorial University and who is from the Deer Lake area, as the research coordinator of the project, which has a timespan of 13 weeks to start. This project is a good start in delving into the Deer Lake area's heritage and culture, as well as aiding in keeping seniors connected and active in their community. Our community can only be stronger with the involvement of our elders.

The Deer Lake Heritage Project will be working with the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador's ICH office to create a digital collection of Deer Lake area oral histories on Memorial University's Digital Archives Initiative. Stay tuned for more details in a future edition.

Centenarian of Spaniard's Bay

By Lisa Wilson

One of the things that I love about being a folklorist is that I frequently get to seek out elders in a community. In everyday life I rarely have the chance to meet people from older generations, but when collecting oral histories for work, it comes with the territory. Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with a centenarian who, at 106, is the oldest person I've ever spoken with. Interviews like this are not ones that can easily be forgotten. Cecil Greenland is personable, active, humorous and has an unbelievable memory. During our visit, he recalled for me some of his family history, and then talked about the busy life he has lead. Originally from Coley's Point, Cecil now lives with his daughter Linda in Spaniard's Bay. While not serving as a full-time caregiver (Cecil has someone come in for that), Linda helps ensure that he remains mentally and physically active. Cecil is special for reaching such an old age, but many members of his family have lived long, productive lives too. He thinks he has good genes, but also cites staying active as a reason behind his longevity. Here is some of his life's story:



"My full name is Cecil Llewellyn Greenland. Now, you wonder where I got the name Louellen? Well, I was called after the Bishop. The Bishop baptized me, Bishop Llewellyn Jones baptized me over in St. John's Evangelist Church in 1906. I was born on Coley's Point--years ago you'd say Coley's Point and they'd take it for granted it was Bay Roberts because it has always been a part of the community. I'm one of eight boys. My mother had three boys in one birth, and twins in one birth, and the only sister we had, Ethel, she died of blood poisoning when she was 12 years old. The only sister we had--the rest was all boys. Jim, my oldest brother, he's dead. He was 98. And Arthur, he was the youngest of the boys, he was 89. And George was the school teacher--a school teacher all his lifetime--he was 99 when he died. And Isaac was 97 when he died, and I'm 106 and almost 6 months. I'm going to try for 107 anyway, but maybe I might change my mind and go for 110."

"I was 7 years old when I went to school first. You had to be 7 in order to get in school. We had soccer, and we had a game called cricket, we had football, and we had hockey. Oh yes, I played a lot of hockey in my day, you know. I played on Bell Island, played in Carbonear, played in St. John's, Harbour Grace, Brigus. I also have four trades. I was a school teacher one time I taught in a little settlement down in Bonavista Bay, a place called St. Chad's. An epidemic struck the little town and the department of health closed the school ... I have been around. I've fished the Labrador--three years cod fishing and one year salmon catching. And I'm a carpenter by trade. I have my certificate as a full-fledged carpenter."

During his time as a carpenter, Cecil built 18 or 19 homes, including the one he is living in now. He built his present house from start to finish when he was 80 years old. Linda was quick to acknowledge this accomplishment--when he said that he had hammered in every single nail for the house, she nodded and told me that he was speaking the truth. Even though he can no longer build houses, Cecil always takes on smaller projects and likes to spend time "puttering around" in his workshop. He seemed very pleased with his daily routine and let it be known that he won't be slowing down anytime soon. In the meantime, I look forward to helping him celebrate his 107th birthday in October of this year.

Top photo, Cecil Greenland. Bottom photo, Cecil's workshop. Photos by Lisa Wilson.



Lumberwoods carvings in Newfoundland

By Nicole Penney

Wood carving in Newfoundland was one tradition that developed among lumber camp workers as a means to pass the time.

I recently came across two hand carved, wooden, lumbering figures at a local flea market and was told by the seller they were carved many years ago by a man from Botwood who had worked in the lumber woods.

Lumber camp life could be grueling and monotonous. Men travelled many kilometres deep into the woods, often in the middle of winter, to cut, collect and transport lumber. The work was dangerous and loggers had to be wary not only of injuries from saws and axes but also from falling trees and rolling logs.

In *Life in a Lumber Camp*, George Austin Woodward tells of a lake captain who “in his younger days spent several years in the woods [and] remarked that if he had his choice between spending three months in a lumber camp and the same amount of time in jail, he would unhesitatingly choose the latter.”

Despite the demanding routine and hardship of lumber camp life, lumbermen did find ways to have fun. The only day off the men had was Sunday and they would occupy themselves by singing folk songs, playing practical jokes and cards, telling folktales and doing handicrafts, such as weaving, leatherwork and woodcarving.

One of the Botwood carvings is of a small lumberman, sporting a full beard and red toque, standing about 12 cm. The lumberman is positioned next to a chopping block, posed as though he is about to take a powerful swing with his axe.



The other carving is a small model sled, loaded down with a pile of miniature logs. A sled, also known in Newfoundland as a catamaran, sledge, sleigh, and slide, has “stout wooden runners curved up in front, hauled in the winter by dogs, horse or man, used especially for carting wood and other heavy loads.” The load of wood on the sled is known in Newfoundland as a slide load and would have been driven down a slide path out of the lumber woods to be cut and sold.

The Botwood carvings are reminiscent of those created by the late Bob Pearcey. These carvings, which mostly reflect the Pearcey family’s involvement in the fishery, also include pieces influenced by the logging industry. On display at Pearcey’s Twine Store in the Outer Battery and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory on Memorial University of

Newfoundland’s Digital Archives Initiative, these include a carving of two men using a pit saw and small models of horse drawn sleds carrying piles of logs. Much like the Botwood carvings, Pearcey’s are very colourful and show great attention to detail.

Wood carving among lumbermen is also a tradition in other parts of Canada. For example, the work of lumbermen Joseph Briere of Blind River, Ontario is displayed on the Blind River Digital Collection. His carvings, created circa 1955, include small reproductions of equipment used in the logging industry. Examples include a model Barienger Brake, a device which functioned as a friction brake to slow the descent of horse-drawn sleds loaded with logs on steep hills and mountainsides. Briere’s collection

also contains a horse drawn log skidder, a horse drawn road icing machine and small replicas of lumber camp structures that include a horse stable, a sawmill site and a handmade wooden cabin representing a combination bunkhouse and cookhouse.

Wood carving is also a tradition among loggers in the United States. Exhibits at the Rangeley Lakes Region Logging Museum display traditional art by Maine lumbermen. These include the model drag drays and logging sleds of Carl Tafton, the chainsaw carvings of Rodney Richard and Rodney Richard Junior and the gumbooks (small wooden boxes used to hold spruce gum) and cedar fan towers of William Richard.

As Peggy Yocum notes in *Exuberance in Control*, “William’s fan towers are mind-tricking sculptures with two fans perched on a vertical shaft that supports balls in cages. A traditional form associated with logger artists and their families in Northern Maine and Southern Canada.”

Considering the strong tradition of lumbermen picking up wood carving as a means to pass the time in the camps, it is reasonable to think the Botwood carvings were indeed carved by a lumber camp worker. Moreover, the attention to detail on these figures suggests the creator was familiar with the subject matter and either worked in the camps or knew someone who had.

If you happen to know anything about these figures or have any carved lumbering figures of your own, I would love to hear from you.

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Photos by Nicole Penney

